

1.2m back calls to end Asian elephant horror

Pictures: JONATHAN BUCKMASTER



Broken... the calf is brutalised until it submits to the will of its owner



Rescued...reporter Emily with an elephant at the Chiang Mai sanctuary in Thailand



Free to roam... elephants wade through cooling waters



EXCLUSIVE Emily Braeger

MORE THAN a million animal lovers have demanded an end to the suffering of Asian elephants in the tourism trade – where they are jabbed with metal hooks, chained up and ridden on a daily basis.

Campaigners at Save The Asian Elephants charity, which started the Change.org petition, want a ban on UK firms marketing holiday venues that exploit the animals.

Asian elephants are on the critically endangered list, yet still they are captured in the wild as infants and brutalised into submissive showpieces for tourist attractions in countries such as Thailand and India.

These venues are funded in part by British visitors, drawn to them by the 1,200 UK travel firms that offer tickets to the horror shows.

Duncan McNair, lawyer and CEO of STAE, said the Government needs to act now, before it's too late for these magnificent creatures.

Speaking to the Express, he said: "Save The Asian Elephants'



The elephants entertain tourists

petition has soared above one million signatures – the largest in history for any animal species.

"And petitions aligning with STAE's now number 33 million supporters.

"The world worries deeply about the survival and protection of the iconic Asian elephants and their babies from brutal tourism, so much generated by a reckless UK market where tourists, as well as elephants, are killed in pursuit of profits."

Elephant-related tourism in Thailand is a £415-million-a-year industry and is based on snatching calves from their mothers before breaking their spirits with sickening cruelty so they submit to their "owners".

The fate of Asian elephants, whose surviving population is barely five per cent that of African elephants, is now, in part, in the hands of Rishi Sunak's Government.

Earlier this year, the Conservative party confirmed



YOU CAN SIGN THE PETITION AT <http://surl.li/efomp>

'Cute babies are snatched from mothers'

A THAI conservationist has described how baby elephants are taken away from their mothers and forced into performing for tourists.

Lek Chailert, 60, has rescued more than 200 distressed elephants and many live at her 400-acre sanctuary in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Ms Chailert, pictured, said a

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lot of venues lie to tourists about their practices to make them hand over their cash.

She said: "If they tell you they have an orphaned baby elephant, this is a lie.

"The elephant will have been snatched away from the mother so the owners can manipulate

it and exploit the young animal because it attracts tourists – it is cute. These babies should be with their mothers."

She said a new law in the UK to ban the sale of tickets to unethical venues was "vital" and needed "now".

She added: "The traveller should be aware that deep suffering follows in the wake of their enjoyment."



Appeal... Ab Fab star Joanna

STARS JOIN CALL FOR BAN ON TRAVEL FIRMS ADVERTISING 'HORRORS'

DAME Joanna Lumley and Daily Express columnist Ann Widdecombe say UK travel firms must be banned from promoting elephant tourism to end the "horrors" the animals suffer.

Ab Fab star Joanna, 76, appealed directly to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to stop the advertising of "exploitative" animal trips.

She said: "If people knew what horrors Asian elephants are

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subjected to, so that tourists can pose with them or ride them, I don't believe a single person would endorse such shocking cruelty.

"There must be a new law banning the promotion of holidays and tours which include exploitative animal encounters. We say to the Prime Minister: Please help end this callous

abuse by making such unethical advertising illegal. We trust you to make a compassionate decision.

"And speed is of the essence." Committed animal lover and former Tory MP Ann, 75, said she "wholeheartedly" supported a ban and accused travel firms of "heartlessness". She added: "The extreme suffering of baby and calf Asian elephants is appalling."



Appalled... ex-MP Ann

nor has it heard from Mr Sunak or the Environment Secretary Theresa Coffey.

However, a number of MPs were quick to back the cause when contacted by the Express. Henry Smith, Conservative MP

for Crawley, said: "Highly endangered baby and adult Asian elephants are being beaten, stabbed and brutalised systematically across southeast Asia to 'break their spirits' for easy use in tourism 'experiences'. Shockingly, some

1,200 UK-based travel companies promote and sell such excursions to British tourists before they even leave these shores. Numbers have collapsed and Asian elephants are nearing extinction.

"The proposed new Bill can stop

such cruel abuse of majestic animals for British tourists."

Anna Firth, Tory MP for Southend West, said: "Banning tourist venues that abuse elephants from advertising in the UK will deprive them of customers. It's a

simple step that can help ensure British tourists' cash doesn't end up in the hands of animal torturers."

Will Travers OBE, co-founder of the Born Free Foundation, said: "A handful of true sanctuaries give

SINCE my youth, I have been spellbound by the spectacle of nature and the wondrous array of species which call Earth home.

Every creature, large and small, plays a vital role in our eco-systems. Not least Asian elephants, whose numbers have collapsed in the past century.

Long designated as endangered, the species is now heading towards outright extinction in the wild, where they have always played such a critical role as a "super keystone" species, nourishing the forests of southeast Asia that are crucial for the survival of thousands of species, including our own.

Poaching of Asian elephants, often babies, and their starvation, beating and torture to "break" them for tourist entertainment, is a striking, perhaps paramount, example of man's disruption of the natural order.

Exploitation

As the drumbeat of disaster sounds for Asian elephants, never has time been more pressing to act for this supremely intelligent and social species.

We have routinely broken marvellous creatures' spirit for commercial exploitation.

Now, a fighting spirit is needed to secure their future.

I am highly supportive of new measures proposed by Save The Asian Elephants that aim to protect the species from abusive tourism of the sort so widely promoted in the UK market.

STAE's draft Asian Elephants (Tourism) Bill, requested by the Government in 2019, would ban the domestic advertising, promotion and sale of overseas "attractions" where elephants are abused for tourism.

STAE has identified almost 300 such venues currently being promoted in the UK by 1,200 companies. Self-regulation of the market has demonstrably failed over decades.

Such law would provide compulsion rather than just

COMMENT STANLEY JOHNSON

Former British MEP

encouragement. It will yield huge benefits, stemming demand for unethical venues and steering the market towards genuine sanctuaries and wildlife parks where elephants can be observed exhibiting natural behaviour in herds from a safe and respectful distance.

After years of concealment of the extent and depth of abuse, indifference towards this iconic species is now being seen as unacceptable. A situation where thousands of UK businesses profit from the most extreme abuse to any creature, let alone arguably the most iconic of all, reflects no pride upon us as a nation of animal lovers.

Huge public support is gathering. STAE's petition, now far beyond one million signatures, is the largest in history for an animal species and reflects repeated large-scale polling from different sources over the past seven years.

Politicians and government must heed this extent of feeling and act. Now is their chance, with the Second Reading in the Commons on February 3 of the Animals (Low Welfare Venues Abroad) Act, which tracks the Asian Elephants (Tourism) Bill.

I have had the privilege of watching elephants in their range states across the world. The suffering of captive Asian elephants is extreme.

Man's potential for good must trump our desire for monetary gain, for us and for our environment's good in the long run.

I strongly urge our Government to support legislation to ban the cruel exploitation of and profiteering from this majestic, iconic species whilst there is still time.

rescued elephants a decent life, but the daily exploitation of these intelligent, social, family animals continues because ill-informed tourists pay for that 'once in a lifetime' up close and personal experience."

He added: "I ask everyone to sign the STAE petition."

A Defra spokesperson said: "Our Action Plan for Animal Welfare demonstrates our commitment to promoting high animal welfare standards, both at home and abroad.

"We know animals that are part of tourist attractions are often subjected to cruel and brutal training practices – and we encourage access to research so holidaymakers make informed choices that benefit wildlife."